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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the reluctance on the part of university teacher educators to engage in thorough self-study, frequently a feature of accreditation processes, is inhibiting teacher education reform because the self-study can be a significant means to improve teacher education. Reluctance resides, in part, in the distinction between academic knowledge and its use and knowledge of practice and its use. University educators study others, not themselves. They deal day to day with academic knowledge, not knowledge of practices. But self-study demands the construction of knowledge of practices, with all of its high stakes and public validation. Education faculty who want to pursue broad collaboration with schools or significant institutional and programmatic reform must undertake serious, honest, and through self-study. They must develop a knowledge of practices to be used by themselves to make changes and improvements. Reluctance toward self study and change also resides in faculty attitudinal inhibitors to significant change--inertia, organizational and structural circumstances, personal attitudes, perception and conception of change, and the time, energy and hassle involved. (Contains 34 references.) (JB)

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The Importance of Self-Study in Teacher Education Reform and Re-accreditation Efforts

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THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-STUDY IN TEACHER EDUCATION REFORM AND RE-ACCREDITATION EFFORTS

Introduction

The major premise of this paper is that reluctance on the part of university teacher educators to engage in serious, honest, and thorough self-study is inhibiting, teacher education reform and the use of re-accreditation efforts as means to improve teacher education. The premise is explained with reference to endeavors to form university-school collaborations, sometimes called professional development schools, and to the NCATE (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education) national accreditation process. This reluctance to engage in serious self-study is explained from two perspectives: one that looks at how teacher educators tend to view the nature of professional knowledge and its use, and a second, and related, focus that identifies clusters of factors that often inhibit nearly any large-scale change effort.

Perspective

Developing large-scale, university-school collaborative arrangements and professional development schools has become a major trend for university teacher educators in recent years. But, what those arrangements actually look like varies enormously from those that are nothing more than changed labels for student teaching to true joint university-school collaborative projects. Within the mix are superficial, dishonestly portrayed endeavors that, upon investigation, seem to be efforts by university leaders and faculty to create the appearance of engaging in "front-line" innovations without actually doing so and without making necessary institutional and personal adjustments. Why is this "slight-of-hand reform" occurring? Why such reluctance among university teacher educators to actually do what they say they are doing?

Similarly, many of the self-studies conducted by universities as part of their NCATE re-accreditation efforts appear to be superficial and possibly dishonest portrayals of teacher education programs intended to get "yes" votes without undertaking serious analyses and pursuing needed programmatic reforms. Again, why don't more teacher educators use national accreditation processes to reform and improve themselves and their education of teachers? Why the charade?

Methods, Techniques, and Data Sources

This paper is based on data accumulated over the past ten years by the author in his roles with and research of university-school collaboratives and NCATE re-accreditation efforts, as well as in his university roles as teacher educator in general

and instructor of courses on the development of professional knowledge and competence. Those roles have involved both direct experiences and broad research studies. The roles in addition to university teaching include (1) with university-school collaboratives: director of a collaborative effort at his own university, participant in a network of collaboratives, evaluator of collaboratives and PDS's, consultant to several collaborative efforts, and writing on the topic; and (2) with NCATE re-accreditation efforts: member of NCATE's Unit Accreditation Board, Board of Examiners, and Standards Committee; institutional coordinator of the NCATE review process at his own university; consultant to institutions engaged in re-accreditation self-studies; the National Council for the Social Studies representative to NCATE; and writing on the NCATE review process.

The paper reports on an analysis of documentation drawn from these experiences and roles as well as from reviews of research studies. The analysis was conducted in terms of three guiding questions:

(1) Why do university teacher educators who are (a) developing radically different, new arrangements with schools or (b) preparing for NCATE re-accreditation often avoid honest and thorough self-study and assessment of their own work, programs, institutional structures, and reward systems?

(2) Why do they avoid honest and thorough examination and assessment of their personal strengths and weaknesses as teacher educators?

(3) Why do they avoid open recognition of the strengths and weaknesses that will impact upon the changes that the new collaborative arrangements or the NCATE initiated reforms are likely to produce?

Some of the answers to these questions seem to lie in two related areas of analysis: (1) the nature of the *knowledge of practice* and its application to educator understanding of both what they do and how they understand change processes and (2) the inhibitors to radical, large-scale change and how a knowledge of practice can serve as a tool in confronting such inhibiting factors.

Self-Study and the Nature of Professional Knowledge and Its Use

In his book *Developing Professional Knowledge and Competence*, Michael Eraut (1994) draws upon his own work and a number of other scholars (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Argyris and Schön, 1974; Fernstermacher, 1980; Eraut, 1978; McLaughlin and Marsh, 1978; Oakeshott, 1962; Buchler, 1961; Broudy, Smith, & Burnett, 1964; Jackson, 1968; Lortie, 1975; Weiss, 1977) to argue several interrelated points about

the nature of professional knowledge and its use. Although Eraut's purposes for doing this are to explicate a view of the development of teachers' professional knowledge and competence, the perspective he presents on the nature of professional knowledge can also inform how professionals, including teacher educators, approach self-study and the possibility of radical change in their professional work.

Early in his book, Eraut notes "that professional knowledge cannot be characterized in a manner that is independent of how it is learned and how it is used. It is through looking at the context of its acquisition and its use that its essential nature is revealed." (p. 19). He then says,

> . . . learning knowledge and using knowledge are not separate processes but the same process. The process of using knowledge transforms that knowledge so that it is no longer the same knowledge. But people are so accustomed to using the word 'knowledge' to refer only to 'book knowledge' which is publicly available in codified form, that they have developed only limited awareness of the nature and extent of their personal knowledge. When it comes to practical knowledge acquired through experience, people cannot easily tell you what it is they know. (p. 25).

In the process of drawing this tie between knowledge and its use, Eraut delineates three *contexts of use* that affect the nature of professional knowledge -- the academic context, the policy-discussion context, and the context of practice (p. 20). As applied to educators he labels these contexts (1) academic context (that of the university scholar), (2) school context, and (3) classroom context. (p. 30). Then Eraut states,

> Talking and writing about education is a dominant form of knowledge use in both the academic and school contexts; but the classroom context is fundamentally different. Though talk or writing may influence the perception or conceptualization of action, it does not itself constitute that action. A teacher is not so much in a 'knowing' environment as in a 'doing' environment. (p. 31).

Next, Eraut addresses the question of how knowledge is validated. He suggests, in essence, that (1) knowledge in the academic context is validated through the development and exchange of theories among peer scholars by way of the sharing of ideas in journals and at conferences and the receiving of peer approval and support of those theories as articulated; (2) knowledge in the policy-discussion context is validated through the language of policy and the acceptance of policy statements by their intended audiences; (3) and knowledge of practice is validated, very differently from the first two, by its application and use -- in short, when it works and produces the

intended results. The key observation here is that the validation of practical knowledge carries with it a much more demanding level of accountability than the other two forms of knowledge. Knowledge of practice must work when used (practiced) and if it does or not is open to public view (pp. 19-58).

Although Eraut's analysis of the nature of knowledge is intended for a different purpose, it can also be used to explain, at least partially, why university-level teacher educators, as well as other university educators, avoid serious self-study of what they do as preparers of teachers and other school personnel, the type of self-study that is absolutely necessary if workable university-school collaborations are to be forged and if institutional re-accreditation efforts (such as those of NCATE) are to be useful devices for improving teacher education. At the heart of that explanation is the Eraut distinction between *academic knowledge and its use* and *knowledge of practice and its use*. Stated simply, maybe too simply, university educators usually study others, not themselves. In Eraut's use of the terms, they deal day to day with academic knowledge, not knowledge of practice. But self-study demands the construction of knowledge of practice (personal practice), with all of its high stakes and public validation.

This point can be stated more precisely as follows:

(1) Nearly all types of university scholars, including teacher educators, organize their professional work, and base their status and reputations around the construction of academic knowledge, not knowledge of practice. They develop theories, react to others' theories, adjust theories to fit their own thinking, but they rarely apply those theories to their own educating of teachers. This is not surprising because the focuses of their studies, research, and reading are not usually on themselves or on what they do as college educators. Those focuses are instead on pre-K–12 teaching, school leadership, school curricula, school organization, and so forth. As academic knowledge, the knowledge they construct is validated by how well it is thought through, how well it is grounded in accepted theory, how congruent it is with accepted bases of knowledge, how well it is accepted by scholar peers, and if and where it is published. It is not validated by practice.

(2) In contrast, any useful knowledge that is to be gained by teacher educators from their own serious self-study is in effect knowledge of practice -- their own practice. It is validated by how it is used, by those conducting the self-study to improve their own practice. Because it is knowledge of practice, it involves levels of action (rather than exposition) and public accountability that are both unfamiliar to and frightening for most academicians. Unless everything being

studied is close to perfect, the self-study exposes weaknesses and requires changes that are open to public view.

(3) For university educators, whose life work is embedded in academic knowledge, self-studies are a distraction, time consuming, messy, and threatening.

(4) Without an understanding of the knowledge of practice, university teacher educators who attempt large-scale change, as in cases when they attempt to form university-school collaboratives or when they engage in serious NCATE-generated self-studies, lack a conceptual tool that is necessary for the success of their change effort. Without the perception of a knowledge of practice context, the typical factors that inhibit change (such as those itemized later in this paper) cannot be analyzed, understood, and tackled one by one. They prevent change because they present problems that cannot be solved.

Self-Study as a Basis for University-School Collaborative Reform and NCATE Re-accreditation

University professional education faculty who want to pursue broad collaborations with schools and who wish to use NCATE type re-accreditation efforts as stimuli for significant institutional and programmatic reform must undertake serious, honest, and thorough self-study. They must analyze critically and in depth what they do as teacher educators -- themselves personally, their colleagues as individual professionals, and their programs, units, and institution. In Eraut's schema, they must develop a knowledge of practice -- knowledge to be used by themselves to make changes and improvements. The knowledge they construct will be partly determined by that use.

Therefore, the very context of self-study makes the knowledge that those doing the study construct different from the academic knowledge that they typically generate. It is different in at least two ways. First, it involves action and validation in practice -- how the knowledge is used and what its results are. Second, it is about self, not others. Unlike academic knowledge so typical of university endeavors, validation is not in how well a journal article is received or how much forward the ideas expressed pushed the field of study. The validity of the knowledge constructed through self-study rests with how much it improves practice.

In my work associated with NCATE, I periodically hear a comment such as one I heard recently from a dean of education of a major university, "We did not gain much from our NCATE review process, although we passed." I thought in response, "You missed an opportunity and either avoided a potentially valuable self-study, or misused it."

Teacher educators who understand their personal professional work (their professional practice) and who understand the concept of knowledge of practice, should never make this type of mistake. They should be able to see their work as professional practice that needs to be continuously studied and improved upon. That is the essence of self-study.

Self-Study and Knowledge of Professional Practice as Tools for Overcoming Factors That Inhibit Change

When teacher educators understand and accept what they do in terms of professional practice, they can analyze that practice with a perspective that makes what they do more understandable. This is especially important when they want to make significant changes in their work. As noted above, two instances of such important times of potential change are when teacher educators want to forge new collaborative relationships with schools and when they undertake serious self-study in the process of accreditation reviews.

The remainder of this paper is an effort to illustrate how a process of self-study in the context of knowledge of practice might be pursued. The illustrations are drawn from efforts to form university-school collaboratives and are based on my own experiences and my study of other university efforts at collaboration. Their focus is quite narrow. They concentrate only on one aspect of change in practice -- factors that inhibit change.

The pages that follow consist of my attempt to organize and categorize factors and circumstances that inhibit large-scale educational change so that those factors and circumstances can be analyzed, understood, and dealt with in ways that do not prevent university teacher educators from developing university-school collaboratives. I think of the categories and descriptions as results of initial steps in a self-study with a professional practice perspective. The professional practice perspective is a tool for (1) understanding the inhibitors and (2) formulating means to combat them.

Categories of Inhibiting Factors and Circumstances

Inertia – Dynamics

It is probably a basic fact of human behavior that much of what people do in all aspects of their lives is done because of the routines that they have developed for their day-to-day activity. They do things the way they did them yesterday for at least three reasons: (1) things worked out fine yesterday, (2) there is no reason to change, and (3) any change would require extra effort, thought, and risk.

The same phenomena can also be attributed to groups of people who work together and to the organizations within which they work. These groups and organizations include university faculty, school teachers, university departments, and school organizations. In these contexts the questions raised when educational change is proposed, particularly wide-spread and radical change, are, *Why do that? Aren't we doing well now?* For most situations, the answers to these questions that are supplied by those who want change are likely to be, "Yes, what we are doing now is fine, but we could be doing more, could be doing it better, or could be doing something else." This, in turn, typically prompts a subsequent question, *But why should we change*? This latter question illustrates the inertia-dynamic inhibiting circumstance. People and organizations need convincing reasons for changing from their comfortable routines.

In university-school change efforts in which I have played a role, reasons for changing are necessary all of the time -- to get potential participants' initial attention, to convince them to participate, to encourage them to continue and to do so wholeheartedly. The reasons have to be real and ones with which individuals identify personally. Reasons such as *for the good of the students* or *because we could do better* tend not to be concrete or specific enough to be convincing.

Even when individuals decide initially to participate, incentives that sustain their interest and participation must be repeated periodically. Doing something that counters comfortable routines is not an easy path, and encouragement is required.

Organizational – Structural

As was hinted above, just as with individuals, the organizations and institutions within which we all work have their own structural inertia. Things are done in certain ways and those ways are expected. When change requires modification and adjustments, the adjustments have ripple effects and create surprise. Sometimes, those ripples bump against institutional "ways of doing things" and against rules that are difficult or impossible to change or ignore.

Some of these situations seem insignificant but they have big impacts. For example, when university faculty members are in pre-K–12 schools for half of their academic load, they are not likely to be as available as usual for campus meetings, office hours, casual conversations with peers, and phone calls. Besides, commuting between two places of work is time-consuming and bothersome. Other situations create much bigger problems: How is a faculty member's pay affected if part is paid by the university and part by the schools? How is work with schools calculated in the university reward system? If unusual agreements are made this year, will they be

understood and accepted in the future, particularly at promotion and retirement time? Similar situations impact upon pre-K–12 teachers who engage in university work: Who is teaching the students if a teacher is at a university meeting or teaching a university class? Is the substitute instructor good enough? Will parents be concerned? Will the students miss something because two teachers try to do the teaching usually done by one?

Doing things differently requires adjustments that range widely within organizations and those adjustments involve people and officials not directly tied to the change effort. Because of this effect, potential problems need to be anticipated and those not anticipated need to be addressed. People who have their routines upset need to be attended to, asked for favors, and supplied with apologies. They need to be asked for exceptions and extra work, and to be thanked. Often, those who have to ask for the favors and provide the apologies have to do so on a personal basis and rely on personal friendships, even though the situation is not of their making and no one's fault.

As a result of organizational and structural routines and expectations in universities and schools, special university-school collaborative projects that I know about have to allot time and energy to *making things work.* These efforts require chores well beyond the actual scope of the endeavor and include the use of personal relationships and status that are rarely calculated in the costs of operation. But they do take a toll. At some point, those trying to make the system accommodate the program's needs simply wear down from pushing so much and become reluctant to do so any more. At times, they have asked for more favors than they have a right to ask. At times, those whom they consistently ask to help tire and say "no."

Personal – Attitudinal

Doing things differently and asking others to do things differently are not as comfortable to individuals as leaving things as they are, as is implied above. Therefore, some people simply are not likely to change for any reason and others are not likely to do so without very strong motivation. Reasons for this phenomenon are numerous, including the inertia and organizational factors already described. Others have to do with personality (some individuals are not risk takers); others have to do with personal circumstances (family pressures leave only a limited amount of time and energy for professional activity, and changes are likely to require more of both); and others have to do with the fact that individuals who would be affected by and involved in change simply like things the way they are and believe any change will more likely cause harm than improvement.

If these individuals need to be included in an educational change effort either because they are involved directly in what is to be changed or their cooperation is necessary, they must be convinced to change their minds and their attitudes. They need to agree to participate or, at the least, to agree not to obstruct. Their change of heart must be genuine and be the result of honest convincing. Those who reluctantly concede or who are pressured or tricked into agreeing are likely to have second thoughts and cause problems later as the effort proceeds.

Sometimes reluctance does not surface at the start of a change effort. The ideas sound good, the goals are admirable, the amount of commitment and effort needed is understated. Besides, everyone else, so it seems, is going to participate. Only later, reality sets in. The initial changes lead to others that were not anticipated, the ripple effect mentioned above becomes more apparent and less manageable. Adjustments that seemed to be rather simple turn out to be complex. More time and energy is required and both must be taken from the time and energy usually devoted to more routine things, such as teaching students.

So, serious educational change requires a mechanism that allows individuals to choose *not* to participate as well as a means for others to drop out in a face-saving way. Given the need to motivate people to participate and to continue in an effort mentioned above, it is difficult to provide face-saving ways for those same individuals and colleagues to drop out. But, somehow, it must be done. Serious changes will not be successful if those who participate dislike their involvement and feel trapped.

Perceptual – Conceptual

Change, by its very nature, is movement from that which is more familiar to that which is less well understood. Because this is so, how people view and understand change in general, as well as the specific changes involved in a particular change effort, are important to them as participants and to the effort itself. The phenomenon is cognitive at its base, as well as attitudinal as described above.

Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline* (1990), talks about people's inability to conceptualize truly changed circumstances because their ideas of the new are always encumbered by their views from the present. This idea is as valid for individuals as they approach a particular change effort as it is for people in general. When individuals decide to undertake an educational innovation, they base that decision on their present understanding of what would be involved. Typically, that understanding is limited at the start, possibly erroneous, then it changes as the person participates and learns more, and as the effort itself evolves.

People's perceptions and conceptualizations of an educational change, therefore, can have several inhibiting effects, such as (1) they could have an erroneous understanding of the effort and not participate or be an obstructionist based on that misunderstanding; (2) they could have an erroneous understanding of the effort and decide to participate only to find out things are not as they thought; (3) they could misassess the extent and pervasiveness of the effort; and (4) they could misunderstand their own role in the effort. Any of these misunderstandings and many others like them are likely to be serious inhibiting factors. The point I am making here, however, is *not* that there should not be any misunderstanding. There will be misunderstanding, but it must be anticipated and provided for as a normal aspect of any change process.

So, for educational change endeavors the size and extent of forging university-school collaborative efforts, errors in perception and conceptualization must be provided for. In addition, the evolution of participants' understanding of what they are about must be anticipated, accepted as normal, and fostered. This, of course, takes energy, understanding of the process, and interpersonal skill by the leaders of the effort. It also takes an enormous amount of time.

Time, Energy, and Hassle

All that has been described above illustrates the point that large-scale, substantial change consumes much time and energy of those directly involved, and, in the process, creates hassling circumstances for them. There are points at which they ask, *What did I get myself into*? *Why did I agree to do this*? These, assuredly, are inhibiting factors. They cause some people to avoid change, some to oppose it, some to play only minor roles, some to change their minds after beginning, and some to "burn out".

Somehow, the time, energy, and hassle of educational change efforts need to be anticipated and accommodated if the change is to succeed. Making these accommodations requires in itself time, energy, and hassle, for at least some of the participants.

Conclusion

The most general conclusion of this paper is that many large-scale reform and restructuring efforts of university teacher education programs fail to achieve the success anticipated for them because of a general lack of understanding by teacher educators of a knowledge of practice perspective about self-study. As a result, they do not see their work as professional practice and do not see self-study as a part of their professional work. Self-study, when it occurs, is typically pushed from outside or from

above in the institutional structure and is seen as an intrusive burden that interrupts the "real work" of faculty. Therefore, teacher educators rarely study themselves and are rarely expected to do so. They study the practice of others -- pre-K–12 teachers and other school personnel -- but from an academic context. They rarely engage in knowledge seeking efforts about themselves and their own work in order to inform themselves about what they do and about what and how they can improve.

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